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THE CLAIMS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BOSTON, JUNE 17, 1829,

BEFORE THE

ANNUAL CONVENTION

OR

The Protestant Episcopal Church,

IN THE

STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

BY JOSEPH MUENSCHER,

Rector of St. John's Church, Northampton.

BOSTON :

PUBLISHED BY R. P. & C. WILLIAMS,

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SERMON.

St. Luke xi, 2.

THY KINGDOM COME.

PRAYER is at once a reasonable and delightful duty. It is the dictate of natural religion—the command of Revelation—the natural language of piety—and an indispensable evidence of our reconciliation to God and of our union with Christ. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our relation to the Great Parent of the universe, and an expression of our dependence upon him for all that is good and desirable in existence. It is the voice of faith uplifted in accents of penitence, love and hope to the Father of mercies. Prayer is the confession of sin to Him who only can pardon it—of infirmity to Him who alone can impart grace to help in time of need. It is the overflowing of a grateful heart to Him who is the author of all its mercies—the source of all its joys—the inspirer of all its hopes.

Prayer is the channel of communication between earth and heaven—the medium of holy intercourse and fellowship between the immortal principle which dwells in man and that Great Spirit, who, by his life-giving influences fills and pervades all things. Where is the Christian who has not learned the efficacy and enjoyed the consolation of prayer? Where is the

Christian who, penetrated with a sense of his own ignorance and imperfection, has not often been ready to adopt the language of Elihu of old, "Teach us what we shall say unto God, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness."*

Prompted by feelings like these, the immediate followers of our Lord expressed their desire that he would instruct them in what manner they should address God and give them a set form of prayer as John had done to his disciples.

The time has been, when to offer supplications to God in a precomposed form of words, was regarded both as contrary to the divine will and as destructive of the spirit of devotion. It was little short of drawing nigh to God with the lips, while the heart was far from him. It was profanely assuming the form of godliness, without the exercise of its power. But judicious and reflecting Christians of various denominations are becoming more and more persuaded of the reasonableness and propriety of the request preferred to our Saviour by his disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray." And where is the Churchman who does not rejoice that the Church of his affections, anticipating the wants and wishes of her members, and following the example of her Lord and Master, has set forth in her collective wisdom, a formulary of public worship, which an eminent clergyman, not of our communion,† with remarkable candor and impartiality, has declared to be "almost universally esteemed by the devout and pious of every denomination, and the greatest effort of the Reformation, next to the translation of the Scriptures into the English language,"—"a work which all who are

* Job xxxvii, 19.

† The Rev. Adam Clarke, L L. D. President of the Methodist General Conference in England, and author of a learned and useful Commentary on the Holy Scriptures.

acquainted with it, deem superior to every thing of the kind produced either by ancient or modern times.”*

The concise, yet comprehensive prayer of our Lord, from which the text is taken, is invaluable to us not only as furnishing a model for the composition of prayers, but as exhibiting in the most impressive manner the spirit of our holy religion.—Of the seven petitions which it contains, it is remarkable that *three* are for the universal diffusion of the Gospel—the extension of the knowledge and blessings of true religion to all the families of the earth. “Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Who can read this prayer without being deeply impressed with the conviction that the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of

* Dr. Clarke is not the only clergyman of distinction among the English Dissenters who has recorded his testimony in favor of the Episcopal Liturgy. The Rev. John Wesley, the celebrated founder of the Methodists (flourished A. D. 1750,) thus says of the Book of Common Prayer: “I believe there is no Liturgy in the world, either in any ancient or modern language, which breathes more of solid, rational piety, than the Common Prayer, and though the main of it was compiled considerably more than two hundred years ago, yet is the language of it not only pure, but strong and elegant in the highest degree.” The Rev. Robert Hall, who is probably the most popular and eloquent preacher of the Baptist denomination in England, thus spake of the Liturgy of the English Church in a speech delivered at a meeting of the Leicester Bible Society in 1812: “Though a Protestant Dissenter, I cannot be insensible of its merits. I believe that the evangelical purity of its sentiments, the chastised fervor of its devotions, and the majestic simplicity of its language, have combined to place it in the very first rank of uninspired compositions.” The learned Grotius observes that “the English Liturgy comes so near the primitive pattern that none of the reformed Churches can compare with it.”

universal benevolence? And who can offer it at the throne of grace intelligently and fervently without rising from his knees with his heart swelling with emotions of Christian love and charity towards all the children of men? Love is indeed the grand, distinguishing feature of the Gospel. It proceeded from a God of love, and its gracious design is to promote peace on earth—good will among men,—to destroy the enmity of the heart to God,—to counteract the influence of the selfish principles of our nature by infusing into the soul “that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues; without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God.”* In the exercise of this charity we are directed to pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

God is the sovereign of the universe. His sceptre extends over all the works of his hand, from the highest archangel that stands near his throne, to the imperceptible mote that floats in the air. Of this natural or providential kingdom of God we are directed in the doxology of this divine prayer to say, “Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever.” The name of kingdom is frequently applied in Holy Scripture to the relationship which God bears to all created things as their Maker, Preserver and Governor. Thus David with pathetic eloquence exclaims, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in the earth are thine. Thine is the *kingdom*, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head over all.”† It is not, however, to this the natural kingdom and government of God that the petition in the text refers. This kingdom has endured since, at the fiat of the Eternal, nature sprang into existence, and it will ever continue undis-

* Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday.

† 1 Chron. xxix, 11.

turbed. It is properly the subject of our praises, but not of our prayers. With regard to it we may say with the devout Psalmist, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice;"* but we cannot say, "Thy kingdom come." There is, however, another dominion exercised by God; that in which, by his Gospel and his Spirit he rules over the hearts of voluntary subjects. This moral kingdom was established on earth when man was first created, and it has comprehended all the good and the pious in every age of the world. In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son to publish more fully the laws of this kingdom—to abrogate those ceremonial institutions which were designed only for a local and temporary purpose—to make provision for the universal extension of this kingdom, and, as its spiritual ruler, to exercise unlimited authority over it, with which he is entrusted by the Father, until the final consummation of all things. Then, having put all enemies under his feet; having conquered death, the last and greatest foe of man, he will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father, who shall be all in all.

It is to this kingdom of grace, this reign of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, that the petition in the text refers. This reign has indeed commenced, but is not yet consummated. Notwithstanding more than eighteen centuries have elapsed since the King of Saints gave commandment to his apostles to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, over how large a portion of that land which was given to him for a possession, does the Prince of this world still extend his iron sceptre! How gross the darkness, how grovelling the superstition, how awful the wickedness of vast multitudes for whom the Saviour shed his precious blood! Even in Christian lands, how many, alas! refuse to acknowl-

* Psalm xcvi, 1.

edge allegiance to their Lord and Saviour. Oh! when shall the kingdom of grace indeed come with power? When shall the light of heaven penetrate every dwelling, and the glorious Gospel of salvation afford joy and consolation and hope to every dying sinner?

That time, brethren, we are assured shall come. "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, the name of God shall be great among the Gentiles, and in every place incense shall be offered to his name, and a pure offering."* Even now we see that time approaching. We behold the light breaking forth upon the tops of the mountains. Here and there we see the proud Musselman renouncing his faith in the Arabian Impostor, exchanging the crescent for the cross, and bowing with reverence before the unstained standard of peace and salvation. We see the ignorant and superstitious Hindoo, dissolving the ties of cast, demolishing his idols of brass and wood, and becoming a meek and humble follower of the lowly Jesus. We see the African rising from the abyss of mental and moral degradation into which he had fallen, and stretching forth his suppliant hands to the only living and true God.

In the text we are taught to pray that the knowledge of pure and undefiled religion may be diffused over the whole earth—that all men may acknowledge the truth, exhibit the fruits and enjoy the blessings and rewards of Christianity.

The Church is the visible kingdom of Christ. All his true disciples are required by baptism to become members of it, and thereby publicly to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Master, as well as their only Saviour, and to pledge themselves to a strict and conscientious obedience to his laws. The church, or society of the faithful, was established by Christ him-

* Malachi i, 11.

self, who appointed the Apostles and their successors duly authorised and commissioned, to the ministry and oversight of the same. He has promised to be with his Church to the end of the world, and has assured us that “the gates of hell”—all the powers of the invisible world—“shall not prevail against it.” To the Church are entrusted the oracles of truth; to her are committed the ministry of reconciliation and the sacraments of religion. By means of the Church the Gospel is to be communicated to all mankind, the institutions of religion perpetuated, and the worship of the one true God through Jesus Christ spread over the face of the earth. To pray, therefore, for the increase and prosperity of the *visible Church* of Christ is to pray for the augmentation of the *kingdom* of Christ; it is to desire that the divinely constituted means of grace may be extended in God’s appointed way, and blessed to the salvation of immortal souls.

I infer then from the text that it is the duty of Christians to desire and pray for the universal extension of the Church of Christ. And if this be their duty, then are they manifestly required to add to their prayers their active exertions for the accomplishment of this most desirable event—to contribute liberally, as God may have blessed them, to this benevolent and glorious object. The age of miracles has long since passed away. In the exercise of his moral, as of his natural government, God operates by means. He makes use of his creatures as the almoners of his favors. If the Church is to be spread over the earth, it must be by the blessing of God on the zealous labors of its members. If the argument often advanced against the divine origin of our holy religion, deduced from the limited extent of territory within which its benefits have hitherto been enjoyed, is ever to be practically refuted, it must be by the prayers and united efforts of Christians. If the prophecies of Scripture in relation to the ultimate triumph and universal dissemination of the Gospel are

ever verified, it must be by cheerful and hearty responses to the promptings of that Spirit of love which should dictate the petition, "Thy kingdom come."

Our duty then, my brethren, is to labor with fervent and untiring zeal for the extension of the visible Church of Christ—to place the means of religion within the reach of all, and then look to God for a blessing on those means. This is the general principle by which we are to be governed; but a difficulty arises in regard to its application. We look around us and behold various distinct sects and denominations of Christians, differing from one another as to their ministry, ecclesiastical government, articles of faith and modes of worship, yet all claiming to be branches of the true Church of Christ. Under which of these various forms is it *our* special duty to promote the Church? We profess to believe the Episcopal Church to be a true and living member of the body of Christ. On general grounds, therefore, she has at least equal claims upon our prayers and contributions with other denominations of Christians. But are there not special considerations which give her in our estimation a decided superiority over every other body of Christians claiming to be a Church of Christ, and which prompt us to united and vigorous efforts to extend her pale both in our own land and in other lands? Do we not find in her a combination of excellences which we in vain look for elsewhere, and which demand corresponding exertions on our part to disseminate her principles and afford to all the enjoyment of her institutions?

1. *Examine in the first place her doctrines.* These we affirm are eminently evangelical. It is said of the primitive church at Jerusalem that her members "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."* They cordially believed, they firmly maintained, they labor-

* Acts ii, 42.

ed to propagate those principles of divine truth which they had received of the first preachers of Christianity. It is our happiness, my brethren, to belong to a Church which has received and constantly adhered to the same great principles which these primitive believers embraced, and which gave them the victory in the hour of martyrdom. It is the glory of the Episcopal Church that, notwithstanding the discordant and heretical opinions which at various times have agitated the Christian world: in spite of the corruptions of Christianity within and the attacks of infidelity without, she has firmly and constantly maintained the grand, distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel—those truths which have been the joy and consolation and support of true believers in every age. The writings of her eminent divines are appealed to as authority by evangelical Christians of all denominations. Her Articles, Liturgy and Homilies are monuments not only of the wisdom and piety of the venerable English Reformers, but likewise of their soundness in the faith once delivered to the saints. No considerations should induce a Christian to lend his influence to advance the interests of a Church whose doctrines are not in accordance with those delivered by the founder of Christianity and his immediate followers. No matter to how much respect she may be entitled for her antiquity: no matter how primitive she may be in her ministry, or imposing and impressive in her ritual: if she hold and require her ministers to teach doctrines which are at variance with the Scriptures of truth, however well calculated these opinions may seem to be to promote her temporal prosperity and increase her temporal power, or however they may come recommended by their accordance with human reason, by their coincidence with the spirit of the age, or by their seeming liberality, she is an unsound member of the body of Christ, and we cannot conscientiously bid her God

speed. The Episcopal Church, however, is far from being obnoxious to a charge like this. The doctrines which she inculcates she believes may be proved by most certain warrant of Holy Scripture; and she is confirmed in the correctness of her exposition of divine truth by its accordance with the views of the universal Church in its earliest and purest days. In her formularies which were sealed by the blood of martyrs and confessors whose pure spirits now rejoice before the throne of God, she acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice.* She declares that man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil.† She affirms that Christ has made by his death upon the cross, a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual, and that there is no other satisfaction for sin but that alone.‡ She believes that we are accounted righteous before God only for the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our works or deservings.§ She acknowledges Christ to be the Son of God, a partaker of the divine nature, and a proper object of love, confidence, obedience and religious homage.|| She receives him in all his offices as a divine prophet to instruct, as an High Priest to make atonement and intercession for his people, and as a king to exercise authority over his Church, which is his spiritual kingdom. In all her services she inculcates the necessity of repentance, or an entire change in respect to our religious views, affections and con-

* Articles of Religion. Art. 6. Collect for the second Sunday in Advent.

† Article 9.

‡ Prayer of consecration in communion service. Art. 31.

§ Article 11.

|| Article 2. The Common Prayer passim.

duct ; she teaches the necessity of the special influences of the Holy Spirit, the third person in the adorable Trinity, to renew us unto holiness, to put into our minds good desires, to strengthen our pious resolutions, and to aid our virtuous endeavors. She inculcates the importance of the sacraments, not only as badges of our Christian profession, but as necessary means of grace, through which, when rightly received and faithfully improved, spiritual life and health and vigor are imparted to the soul.* She strenuously and constantly insists on the indispensable necessity of a virtuous and pious life, both as the natural effect of genuine faith, and as the only infallible evidence of our interest in the benefits of the Gospel and of our acceptance with God.

These are some of the cardinal doctrines which are clearly set forth in the formularies of our Church, which are written as with a sunbeam on the pages of the Bible, and which render Christianity pre-eminently the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. But while the Church is thus explicit in regard to the distinguishing truths of the Gospel, she has observed a cautious silence or displayed a commendable moderation in reference to many intricate and speculative dogmas of theology, which have no necessary influence on Christian character, which are but obscurely, if at all, revealed in Holy Scripture, and which have been the subject of endless and angry contention, and the occasion of numerous and unhappy schisms in the body of Christ. She professes not to be wise above what is written. She requires no *Shibboleth* of a party. She names no master but Christ. She gathers her members around no standard but that of the cross. She acknowledges no leader but the great Captain of her salvation. Her system of doctrines is

* Articles 25—27.

drawn not from the writings of any uninspired man, however distinguished for learning and piety, but from the only standard of faith and practice, the word of God. Hence to this day it is a matter of dispute to which particular system, that of Calvin or Arminius, the formularies of our Church belong. "To this day they suffer the fate of the Scriptures themselves, that of being forced under two hostile banners, under neither of which they had enlisted themselves." She has endeavored to occupy a middle ground between the extremes of opinion, where the truth may commonly be found. Under her vine and fig-tree the Calvinist and the anti-Calvinist may equally find shelter, protection and spiritual sustenance. Both conscientiously assent to her articles, use her Liturgy, and attend the ordinances of her worship.

2. *Look next at the Liturgy of the Church.* In addressing God in the use of a prescribed Liturgy, in the performance of which all the congregation may take an active part, we follow the example of the Jewish church from the earliest times; we follow the example of our Saviour and his apostles, who regularly joined in the Liturgical services of the synagogue and temple; we follow the example of the primitive believers and martyrs, and of the great body of professing Christians in every age; in fine, we imitate the worship of heaven, in which we are told the celestial beings *cry one to another* in alternate responses, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

* Isaiah vi, 3. A Liturgy is used by the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Church, and the Armenian Church. Among Protestants it is used by the Episcopal Church in England and the British Possessions, and in the United States. It is used in probably a majority of the German Lutheran Churches,—in many of the Calvinistic Churches,

Nor is this all : experience and the nature of the case clearly shew that a precomposed form of public prayer and praise is altogether the best calculated for social worship. In the house of God we assemble not to hear prayer, as we attend to a sermon, but to pray ourselves. Propriety therefore would seem to suggest that as far as possible the whole congregation should join not only with united hearts, but with united voices, in this solemn exercise ; and where this may not conveniently be done, they should still know beforehand what the sacrifice is which they are expected to offer on the altar of Jehovah.* A precomposed Liturgy, while it is free from many serious objections alleged against extemporary prayer, is at the same time, as all agree, the most effectual preservative against fanaticism and heretical opinions. The history of our Religion affords conclusive evidence that where a Church adopts and requires a strict adherence to a sound, evangelical Liturgy, she is safe. This Liturgy will twine itself around the hearts of her members by a thousand associations which the hand of innovation cannot easily sever. Her clergy may for a time de-

particularly the Dutch Reformed Church throughout Holland,—by the Moravian Church, and in many of the English Methodist Churches, as well Calvinistic as Arminian. Liturgical forms are likewise used in the Unitarian Societies in England, and in at least one Congregation of that denomination in this country. The Swedenborgians likewise worship by a prescribed form, taken chiefly from the Book of Common Prayer.

* Calvin himself, in his well known epistle to the Duke of Somerset, expressed his opinion of a prescribed Liturgy in the following decided terms : “ As for a form of prayer and ecclesiastical rites, I do highly approve that there should be a certain one, from which it should not be lawful for the pastor in his office to depart.”—*Vid. Waterman's Life of Calvin.* p. 337.

part in doctrine and spirit from her established formularies ; but in a contest between the desk and the pulpit, the former will ultimately prevail. The Liturgy of the Episcopal Church has stood the test of examination both of friends and enemies for many generations. It is distinguished for its orthodoxy, its purity, its simplicity, its spirituality, and its comprehensiveness. It has proved an effectual safe-guard against essential error in the worst of times, and has been instrumental of reviving the spirit of piety, where formality, apathy and worldliness had scattered the seeds of spiritual death over the fair vineyard of Christ's inheritance.

3. Again. *The Church we venerate is apostolic in her ministry.* "It is evident unto all men, diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient authors, (says the preface to the ordinal of the Church,) that from the apostles' times there have been three officers in Christ's Church, bishops, priests and deacons." Being persuaded from the New Testament and from ecclesiastical history, that the apostles, who acted under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, vested the power of ordination exclusively in the highest order of the ministry, the Church maintains the divine institution of Episcopacy, which she believes to be of perpetual obligation. She cannot acknowledge the right of any man or body of men to change the Christian Ministry, for the same reason that she cannot acknowledge their right to abolish infant baptism, to change the Christian Sabbath, or to exclude females from the table of the Lord. All these are supported by the same kind of evidence ; they must stand or fall together, and with them the very canon of Scripture itself. In the Church to which we belong, it is universally acknowledged that the sacraments of religion are *duly* administered, according to the will of Christ. Can we feel the same

assurance in respect to those denominations of Christians which admit of Presbyterian and Lay Ordination? Here, then, the Church presents another claim on our regard, a claim, strengthened by the important consideration that *that* form of government in which is recognized a distinction of orders in the ministry with separate powers, is found to be altogether the best system for the preservation of unity, peace and due subordination in the Christian Church.

4. Further. *In her terms of communion the Church exercises that "charity which hopeth all things."* In respect to doctrine, she requires of those who ask for admission to baptism and the Lord's Supper, assent only to those articles of belief which are contained in the Apostles' Creed. This Creed is a summary of the faith which was formed at so early a period and is so comprehensive and yet so free from all abstract and metaphysical doctrines, that nearly all professing Christians agree in the use of it.—With regard to Christian character, the Church is careful to require no tests which are unauthorized by the word of God. She claims no infallibility, no power to judge the hearts of men; but, charitably presuming that all who acknowledge their belief in the Apostles' Creed, who profess to be truly penitent for their past sins, and promise "to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in his holy ways," are sincere in their declarations, she receives them to her communion and fellowship. At the same time she declares, on the authority of St. Paul, that "in such only as worthily receive the sacraments, they have a wholesome effect and operation." And "as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive" the holy communion, "so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily."*

* See the Communion Service, and Articles 25 and 29.

5. The last distinguishing feature of our Church which I shall notice is her *unity*. No candid person can peruse the writings of the New Testament without being persuaded that in the estimation of our Saviour and his apostles, union and fellowship among Christians is a sacred and important duty. Just before his crucifixion our Lord prayed that his disciples in every age of the world might be one.* St. Paul exhorts the Ephesians to “endeavor,” or as it might be rendered, *labor intensely* “to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”† He charges the Corinthians “that there be no schism in the body”‡—no division in the Church, no separation into sects and parties. But this unity of spirit cannot be effectually promoted, nor can schism be prevented without a common faith and common institutions of religion. Of our own Church it may be said, she is united in the same essential articles of belief, she is united in the same apostolic ministry and government, she is united in her sacraments and in the terms of communion, she is united by a common interest. In fine, she is in all things emphatically “one body and one spirit, even as she is called in one hope of her calling.” She has “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”§ She is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”|| While she is at unity with herself, her moderation in respect to doctrine and her liberality as it regards the terms of communion, admirably fit her for becoming a common centre of union of men of all denominations who

* John xvii, 20, 21.

† 1 Cor. xii, 25.

|| Eph. ii, 20, 21.

† Eph. iv, 3.

§ Eph. iv, 4—6.

love our Lord in sincerity. Such are some of the more obvious and important characteristics of the Episcopal Church, which claim for her our love and impose on us a weight of obligation to unite our prayers and our zealous and untiring efforts to extend her pale, till it embrace every spot where man can worship, or where God will hear.

I shall conclude this discourse with one or two observations suggested by the subject we have been considering.

1. Let us cultivate, my brethren, a spirit of Christian fellowship and union among ourselves. It has already been remarked that the Church is united in the belief of the same doctrines and in the observance of the same religious institutions. But this unity in externals is chiefly important, as it has a tendency to enkindle and cherish that unity of the spirit upon which the real prosperity of every Christian community depends. It was brotherly love which in the days of the primitive believers, disarmed prejudice of its power, and put to silence the voice of opposition. They "continued steadfastly," not only in the same belief,—“the apostle’s doctrine,”—and in the united observance of the same religious institutions—“in breaking of bread and in prayer ;” but likewise “in fellowship,” i. e. in the exercise of brotherly love. They were knit together in the bonds of Christian affection, participating in each other’s joy, sympathising in each other’s sorrow, contributing to each other’s relief, and combining their energies and uniting their efforts for the promotion of the truth as it is in Jesus. And what was the consequence ? They had “favor with all the people ; and the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.”* The enemies of the Gospel were put to silence ; friends were raised up on every side ; the

* Acts xi, 46, 47.

grace of God was shed abroad among them; the Church flourished and increased, and immortal souls were saved.

Such, in the apostolic age, were the blessed effects of Christian unity. Let the same spirit prevail among us. Let us love as brethren, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. Guard, my brethren, against a spirit of party. Into no department of society can party spirit enter without inflicting the most serious injuries. But in the Church of Christ especially it is the prolific source of a thousand irreparable evils. It checks the spirit of piety; damps the ardor of devotion; generates a suspicious, censorious, uncharitable disposition; causes heart-burnings among brethren of the same Christian communion; blinds the judgment; calls into exercise all the worst passions of our fallen nature; spreads anarchy and confusion through the Church, tearing asunder the body of Christ, and separating those whom God has ordained should be one. Party spirit is contrary to the genius of the institutions of our Church. Where shall we find so many bonds of Christian unity as exist within our communion? A *perfect* agreement in religious sentiment among her members was, indeed, never expected by the Church. This, from the nature of the human mind, is probably impossible. And it certainly is not indispensable to the exercise of Christian charity. We know that the Apostles themselves were not agreed on all subjects. The Church therefore allows her members to differ in opinion as to many points of doctrine and practice, while at the same time she has provided in her Liturgy and Articles, that this difference shall not be so great as to justify the existence of parties and divisions; or to warrant the indulgence of a spirit inconsistent with that which it is the tendency of all her institutions to promote. Let no party distinctions and party names, my Christian brethren,

be known among us. Let our regard for our common Christianity—let our desire for the growth and prosperity of the Church we venerate—let our anxiety for the salvation of our fellow men prompt us to be fervent in our supplications at the throne of divine grace, that He, “who has built the Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone, would grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple, acceptable unto him, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* Thus will the harmony, which, from the first organization of our Church in this country, has characterized all her deliberations, be perpetuated; brotherly love will continue; God will pour upon our Church the abundance of his blessing; the little one will soon become a thousand; the small cloud on the horizon will soon fill the eye; the small stone soon become a mountain.

2. Let the subject we have been considering excite us to a more zealous co-operation in support of those institutions which have for their object the advancement of the Church. The age in which we live is eminently an age of religious enterprize. Evangelical Christians of other denominations are actively employed in disseminating those views of religion, and introducing those forms of worship, which they conceive to be correct. Not content with building up the waste places of Zion, and supplying the wants of the destitute in our own land, with a zeal which cannot be sufficiently admired, and which we should do well to imitate, they are bearing the glad tidings of great joy to heathen lands, and rearing temples on heathen ground for the worship of the only living and true God, through Jesus Christ. Have we no part to take in this labor of love? Have we no message of salvation to send to those who

* Collect for St. Simon and St. Jude's Day.

are perishing for lack of knowledge? no cup of joy and consolation—no bread of eternal life to offer to those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Yes, brethren, we have much to do for the honor of God and the benefit of man, both in heathen lands and in our own country. Our Heavenly Father has permitted us in his providence to become ministers and members of a Church, whose doctrines, as we believe, are the doctrines of eternal truth, whose ministry is apostolic, whose worship is eminently social, rational and evangelical. A special obligation, therefore, rests upon us to avail ourselves far more extensively than we have yet done, of those means and opportunities that are afforded us, to extend, at home and abroad, the Church which Christ has purchased with his own blood. Tracts explanatory of her doctrine and worship should be more extensively circulated. Indigent young men of piety must be aided in their preparation for the sacred ministry; missionaries must be sent forth to labor in season and out of season,—to gather together the flock of Christ, to strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, and to build up the walls of our Zion. The young must be thoroughly instructed and grounded in the principles of the Church, and trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

To aid in the accomplishment of all these important objects, associations have been formed within the bosom of our communion. Our Tract, Education, Missionary and Sunday School Societies, call with earnest and affectionate importunity upon us for help. Will we not sustain these institutions, upon which the prosperity of our Church so materially depends? Shall the bruised reed be broken? Shall the smoking flax be quenched? Shall the Macedonian cry which is heard from every quarter be disregarded? No, it cannot be.

Our regard for the Church of our affections will not permit it. Our regard for our holy religion and its divine author will not permit it. Our regard for immortal souls will not permit it.

At no former period has so favorable an opportunity of extending the pale of our Church occurred, as, in the providence of God, is now presenting itself. Amid the agitation and turmoil of conflicting opinions—amid the schisms which are making rapid strides in the midst of us, breaking up old associations and removing ancient land-marks, many are looking round for an ark of safety, and are turning their eyes toward that Church from which their fathers, in an unhappy hour, separated. Long cherished but unfounded prejudices are giving way, and the distinctive principles of the Episcopal Church are becoming better understood and appreciated. Is not, then, our duty plain and imperative? The success which has attended the labors of our ministry, the large accession which, notwithstanding peculiar disadvantages and impediments, has been made, within a few years, to the number of our Churches, afford us every encouragement to be unwearied in well doing—to go forward in this good work with a firmer step and a lighter heart, and unshaken confidence in the blessing of God.

To conclude: now, brethren, we are members of the Church militant on earth. The Captain of our Salvation commands us to act as good soldiers of his cross—to “fight” manfully “the good fight of faith,” and to cease our exertions only when “the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ”—“when none shall say, Know ye the Lord, for all shall know him from the least to the greatest.”*

* 1 Tim. vi, 12. Rev. xi, 15. Jere. xxxi, 34.

It devolves on us, my brethren, as ministers of Christ and as members of his body, to hasten the millennial glory of Christianity—to spread abroad the knowledge of that Redeemer through whom we obtain the remission of our sins, and are authorized to hope for a blessed immortality beyond the grave. It devolves on us to communicate to our fellow men those sacraments and ordinances of religion through which God is pleased to impart health to the soul, and peace to the conscience. We have not long to work in the vineyard of the Lord. We shall soon be called to render up our account to him. May we, therefore, especially on occasions like the present, stir up one another to diligence and activity in our Master's service; that when we shall be summoned away from the scene of our present labor we may rest forever in the bosom of our God.

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